

Birds to find: a review of 'lost', obscure and poorly known African bird species

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Des oiseaux à rechercher: un aperçu d'espèces d'oiseaux africains 'perdus', obscures et mal connues. En Afrique, il y a au moins neuf espèces d'oiseaux menacées d'extinction et huit classées comme 'Insuffisamment documentées' pour lesquelles il n'y pas de mentions récentes, dont quatre pour lesquelles il n'y a pas eu de données documentées depuis plus de 50 ans (l'Engoulevent de Prigogine *Caprimulgus prigoginei*, connu avec certitude d'un seul spécimen de 1955; l'Alouette d'Archer *Heteromirafra archeri*, dont la dernière donnée date de 1922; le Vanga de Blüntschi *Hypositta perdita*, connu de seulement deux spécimens de 1931; et l'Astrild à masque noire *Estrilda nigriloris*, observé pour la dernière fois en 1950). Les ornithologues peuvent contribuer à la conservation de ces espèces 'perdus', dans certains cas en commençant par confirmer leur survie. En visitant les zones et sites d'où ces espèces sont connues, ou pourraient se trouver, et en collectant des données sur la présence, l'abondance, l'habitat et l'écologie de ces espèces, les ornithologues peuvent fournir les données de base indispensables aux actions de conservation. Dans cet aperçu, l'auteur présente succinctement 17 espèces qui n'ont pas été observées récemment, ainsi qu'une sélection de 20 autres espèces peu connues qui sont menacées ou classées comme 'Insuffisamment documentées', parmi lesquelles l'énigmatique Engoulevent de Nechisar *Caprimulgus solala* qui n'est connu que d'une aile. La plupart des observateurs d'oiseaux en Afrique semblent visiter les mêmes sites déjà bien connus, tandis qu'il reste énormément d'occasions d'utiliser leurs compétences et ressources d'une manière qui serait plus utile à la conservation. Pourquoi ne pas quitter les sentiers battus à la recherche de ces espèces et contribuer ainsi à leur conservation?

Summary. There are at least nine threatened and eight Data Deficient bird species in Africa for which there are no recent records, including four which lack documented records for over 50 years (Prigogine's Nightjar *Caprimulgus prigoginei*, known with certainty only from a 1955 specimen; Archer's Lark *Heteromirafra archeri*, last recorded in 1922; Blüntschi's Vanga *Hypositta perdita*, known only from two specimens dated 1931; and Black-lored Waxbill *Estrilda nigriloris*, last recorded in 1950). Birdwatchers can make a valuable contribution to the conservation of these 'lost' species, in some cases initially by confirming their continued existence. Through visiting the areas and sites from where the species are known, or likely to occur, and by collecting data on the occurrence, abundance, habitat needs and basic ecology of these species, birders can provide the foundation from which conservation action can flow. In this review, I provide short summaries for the 17 species that have not been recently recorded, plus for a selection of 20 other poorly known threatened or Data Deficient species, including the enigmatic Nechisar Nightjar *Caprimulgus solala* which is known only from a wing. Most birders in Africa seem to visit the same well-established sites, but there is tremendous opportunity to apply their skills and resources in a way that will deliver significant conservation benefits. Why not venture off the beaten path, track down these species, and assist their conservation?

The corpse was partially squashed into the soil in a vehicle track, but it caught the attention of a group of British and Ethiopian wildlife surveyors during a night survey of Nechisar National Park, Ethiopia. As they prised it free, a few feathers blew away, but they salvaged a wing in good condition. It was about midnight on 3 September

1990, and this was the first and still the only time that the scientific and ornithological community has connected with what proved to be a previously undescribed species, Nechisar Nightjar *Caprimulgus solala* (Safford *et al.* 1995). Careful subsequent comparison with skins and other data indicated that the wing was highly distinctive and

fitted no known species. But no other records were made during almost 200 hours of night surveys in the park, despite field observations of over 100 individuals of four other nightjar species. The species has never been recorded in subsequent searches, though few of these have examined birds in the hand.

Rediscovering this species would be spectacular news, and tremendously exciting for any birder, as well as helping to further the nightjar's conservation. Such rediscoveries are perfectly possible, as many examples attest. The most recent was on 1 November 2006, when Lily-Arison René de Roland and Thé Seing Sam observed nine adult and four young Madagascar Pochards *Aythya innotata* at a site in northern Madagascar (R. Watson & L.-A. René de Roland *in litt.* 2006; see pp. 171–174). The species had almost been given up as extinct because a single male captured alive in August 1991 in the Lake Alaotra basin had been the only certain record since 1960, despite intensive searches (including major publicity campaigns) in that area.

Another example is Braun's (Orange-breasted) Bush-shrike *Laniarius brauni*, which was previously known from just two sites in the northern escarpment zone of Angola, and had not been recorded since 1957 (although a 1982 record of Crimson-breasted Gonolek *Laniarius atrococcineus* by Günther & Feiler [1986] may refer to this species: W. R. J. Dean *in litt.* 2005). Ian Sinclair and others mounted an expedition to track *L. brauni* down, and rediscovered it in February 2005 (Sinclair *et al.* 2007). Two other Angolan endemics have been put back on the map after no records for 30 years or more: Swierstra's Francolin *Francolinus swierstrai* and Gabela Helmet-shrike *Prionops gabela* (Ryan *et al.* 2004, Sinclair *et al.* 2004; M. S. L. Mills *in litt.* 2006). Yellow-throated Serin (Yellow-throated Seedeater) *Serinus flavigula* was refound after an even longer interval. It had been known from three 19th century specimens (the most recent dating from 1886) taken in a small area in Shoa province, eastern Ethiopia, until its rediscovery there in March 1989 by John Ash and Tom Gullick (Ash & Gullick 1990).

Here I provide short summaries for species that have not been recently recorded (generally, for 10+ years), including nine threatened and eight Data Deficient species, plus for a selection of six

other poorly known threatened species and all 14 Data Deficient species not currently under review for reclassification as Least Concern (see www.birdlifeforums.org). Data Deficient species are so obscure that it is not even possible to assign them meaningfully to a category of extinction risk on the IUCN Red List. Some may prove not to be threatened, but further data on them, and of course the threatened species, is urgently needed before their conservation needs can be determined and appropriate action devised. The accounts are divided by subregion, describing each species' status and distribution, gaps in knowledge, and provide tips on where, when and how birders should search for them. The species accounts are not intended to be definitive reviews, but rather to combine recent updates from the field with summaries of the information in the factsheets available on the BirdLife website (www.birdlife.org/datazone/searchspecies). These build on the accounts in *Threatened Birds of the World* (BirdLife International 2000) and *Threatened Birds of the World 2004* CD-ROM (available free by e-mailing science@birdlife.org). Further details on many can be found in Collar & Stuart (1985). The references cited below are mainly additional to those in the BirdLife factsheets.

Birdwatchers can easily make a valuable contribution to the conservation of these species. By visiting the areas and sites where the species are known from, or likely to occur, and by collecting basic information on their occurrence, abundance, habitat needs and basic ecology, they can provide the foundation from which conservation action can flow.

North-east Africa

Somali Pigeon *Columba oliviae*

Data Deficient. This locally common species is endemic to north-east Somalia, where it has been found from 45°E east to Cap Guardafui and south along the east coast to 07°30'N. It is a ground-feeding, rock-dwelling bird of arid, coastal regions, at altitudes of 75–750 m (once to 1,425 m), within 24 km of the coast. There have been records as recently as 2005 at a few sites, including around Galgalo (J. Miskell *in litt.* 2006). A potential threat may come from Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea*, which is still expanding its range very rapidly in Somalia and was observed for the first time in the Galgalo area in April 2005 (J. Miskell *in litt.*

Table 1. Poorly known African bird species discussed in the text. 'Recent' last records are defined as those since 2000.

Tableau 1. Espèces d'oiseaux africains peu connues présentées dans le texte. Les mentions 'récentes' sont définies comme celles postérieures à 2000.

Species	IUCN Red List category*	Distribution	Last recorded
Alaotra Grebe <i>Tachybaptus rufolavatus</i>	CR(PE)	Madagascar	1988
Swierstra's Francolin <i>Francolinus swierstrai</i>	VU	Angola	Recent
Somali Pigeon <i>Columba oliviae</i>	DD	Somalia	Recent
Congo Bay Owl <i>Phodilus prigoginei</i>	EN	Congo-Kinshasa	1996
Anjouan Scops Owl <i>Otus capnodes</i>	CR	Comoros	Recent
Mohéli Scops Owl <i>Otus moheliensis</i>	CR	Comoros	Recent
Grand Comoro Scops Owl <i>Otus pauliani</i>	CR	Comoros	Recent
Maned Owl <i>Jubula lettii</i>	DD	Liberia to Congo-Kinshasa	Recent
Prigogine's Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus prigoginei</i>	CR	Congo-Kinshasa (Cameroon?, Congo-Brazzaville?)	1955 (type-specimen; plus unconfirmed records 1996–97)
Nechisar Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus solala</i>	VU	Ethiopia	1990 (type-specimen)
Schouteden's Swift <i>Schoutedenapus schoutedeni</i>	VU	Congo-Kinshasa (Uganda?)	1972 (plus more recent unconfirmed records)
Fernando Po Swift <i>Apus sladeniae</i>	DD	Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Angola	1961 (unconfirmed record in 1998)
White-chested Tinkerbird <i>Pogoniulus makawai</i>	DD	Zambia	1964 (type-specimen)
Yellow-footed Honeyguide <i>Melignomon eisentrauti</i>	DD	Guinea to Cameroon	Recent
Williams's Lark <i>Mirafra williamsi</i>	DD	Kenya	Recent
Friedmann's Lark <i>Mirafra pulpa</i>	DD	Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania	Recent
Archer's Lark <i>Heteromirafra archeri</i>	CR	Somalia (Ethiopia?)	1922
Obbia Lark <i>Spizocorys obbiensis</i>	DD	Somalia	Recent
Red Sea Swallow <i>Hirundo perdita</i>	DD	Sudan, (Eritrea?)	1994 (type-specimen)
Long-tailed Pipit <i>Anthus longicaudatus</i>	DD	South Africa, Botswana, Zambia	Recent
Eastern Wattled Cuckoo-shrike <i>Lobotos oriolinus</i>	DD	Cameroon, Gabon, Congo, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville	Recent
Liberian Greenbul <i>Phyllastrephus leucolepis</i>	CR	Liberia	1985
Sombre Chat <i>Cercomela dubia</i>	DD	Ethiopia, Somalia	Recent
Somali Thrush <i>Turdus ludoviciae</i>	CR	Somalia	Recent
Short-billed Crombec <i>Sylvietta philippae</i>	DD	Somalia, Ethiopia	Recent
Tana River Cisticola <i>Cisticola restrictus</i>	DD	Kenya	1962
Slender-tailed Cisticola <i>Cisticola melanurus</i>	DD	Angola, Congo-Brazzaville	Recent
Kabobo Apalis <i>Apalis kaboboensis</i>	DD	Congo-Brazzaville	?
Tessmann's Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa tessmanni</i>	DD	Sierra Leone to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea	Recent
Monteiro's Bush-shrike <i>Malaconotus monteiri</i>	DD	Angola, Cameroon	Recent
Bulo Burti Boubou <i>Laniarius liberatus</i>	CR	Somalia	1990 (type-specimen)
Bluntschli's Vanga <i>Hypositta perdita</i>	DD	Madagascar	1931 (type-specimens)
Emerald Starling <i>Lamprotornis (Coccycolius) iris</i>	DD	Guinea, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire	Recent
Bates's Weaver <i>Ploceus batesi</i>	EN	Cameroon	1996
Lake Lufira Weaver <i>Ploceus ruweti</i>	DD	Congo-Brazzaville	1960
Golden-naped Weaver <i>Ploceus aureonucha</i>	EN	Congo-Brazzaville	1994
Yellow-legged Weaver <i>Ploceus flavipes</i>	VU	Congo-Brazzaville	Recent
Black-lored Waxbill <i>Estrilda nigriloris</i>	DD	Congo-Brazzaville	1950

* IUCN categories are as follows: CR (PE) = Critically Endangered (Possibly Extinct), CR = Critically Endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, and DD = Data Deficient.

2006). How this may affect the Somali Pigeon is unknown. No other threats have been identified, but given the species' small range and paucity of recent data, its status is uncertain. Once the security situation permits, birders could contribute significantly to our knowledge by collecting information on its abundance, distribution, ecology and possible threats.

Nechisar Nightjar *Caprimulgus solala*

Vulnerable. This must rate as the least-known bird species in the world, because all the information we have is derived from a single wing (hence the species name *solala*, meaning 'one wing') salvaged from a road corpse on the Nechisar Plains, southern Ethiopia, in 1990 (Safford *et al.* 1995). The dead bird was found on a dirt road in a completely treeless area of the plains, which are a gently undulating 270-km² area of natural short grassland on black-lava soil, at 1,200 m on the Rift Valley floor. The plains are isolated by bushland from any similar short-grass habitat. They lie within Nechisar National Park, but this is threatened by heavy resource-use, including excessive grazing by domestic livestock, rapid clearance of trees for fuel and buildings in the local town of Arba Minch, and illegal fires (although the park management has recently been assumed by the charitable foundation African Parks Conservation, which may improve the situation).

Identifying this species in the field may prove difficult, because its overall appearance and any sexual differences are unknown. However, given the wing's distinctiveness, it is possible that the species would be identifiable in the field. Birders searching for it should be aware that critical examination of the wing pattern will be necessary to prove identification, and this may be difficult without capturing a bird. The specimen had white tips to at least the outer two tail-feathers, a rounded wing, with the wing-coverts marked by large buff spots, and a broad buffish-white band, almost midway along the outer wing, across the four outer primaries (and on the inner web only of the outermost primary). The key point is that the patch lies exceptionally far up the wing (i.e. towards to the carpal joint), especially relative to the (strong and easily seen) emargination in the outer primaries (especially P9, the last but one; Safford *et al.* 1995, R. J. Safford *in litt.* 2006; see Fig. 3). The voice is unknown, but Jackson (2002)

suggested that it is a member of the 'churring' (as opposed to 'whistling') species-group. Searchers should familiarise themselves with the voices of all nightjars known from the area, in the hope of hearing one that sounds different (which they will need to photograph well or even catch to confirm the identification). Although Forero & Tella (1997) questioned the validity of this taxon, Safford *et al.* (1997) convincingly reaffirmed the case for treating it specifically.

Archer's Lark *Heteromirafra archeri*

Critically Endangered. Known only from open, fairly short grassland in an exceptionally restricted area, from Jifa Medir to Ban Wujaleh, west of Hargeisa in north-west Somalia, along the Ethiopian frontier. A claim from north-west of Buramo in 1955 should be considered unconfirmed. It was not seen at Ban Wujaleh, or in adjacent Ethiopia, during five visits to the region between the 1970s and 1990s, nor on ten occasions in 1996–2006 (J. Miskell *in litt.* 2006). A possible sighting was reported from between Hargeisa and Tug Wujaleh in December 2003 (G. Mulholland *in litt.* 2004), and another was claimed at Jijiga, extreme eastern Ethiopia in 2004 (H. Shirihai *in litt.* 2004), but both await documentation. This species' secretive habits make it very difficult to observe: it avoids open spaces, creeps through grass cover, and flies reluctantly. Intensive searches are needed along the Ethiopian–Somali border, perhaps in April–May when it may be singing and more conspicuous (nests have been found in June, but note that the timing of rains can be erratic in this region). The song is undescribed, but the most similar species in the same area, Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans*, differs in its longer tail, rusty-fringed primaries and secondaries, and pale-fringed mantle and wing-coverts.

Obbia Lark *Spizocorys obbiensis*

Data Deficient. This lark is restricted to a narrow coastal strip of south-east Somalia, where it occurs in large, stable, vegetated dunes. It is known from c.570 km of coast, from Halhambe to 47 km south of Jirriiban, being restricted to a strip only c.1 km wide in the south but occurs up to 40 km inland in the north. The most recent sighting was in April 2006, when several pairs were seen at Ceel Dheer and Mareeg (J. Miskell *in litt.* 2006). The

species has been reported as abundant, being found in pairs, small parties and occasionally flocks of up to 30. Though the species can survive in heavily grazed habitat, it is possible that further intensification of grazing and increased demand for firewood, particularly in areas close to Mogadishu, will lead to the destabilisation of dunes and consequent habitat degradation. However, further information on this and other potential threats is needed to inform conservation assessments.

Red Sea Swallow *Hirundo perdita*

Data Deficient. This enigmatic species is known only from the type-specimen, found dead in May 1984 at Sanganeb lighthouse, north-east of Port Sudan, Sudan. Its scientific name—meaning ‘the lost swallow’—is highly apposite, as there have been no more confirmed records. The species’ preferred habitat is unknown, but its morphology is similar to the ‘cliff swallow’ group of species, whose other members prefer open country (e.g. grassland or montane areas), often near cliffs and/or water and/or human habitation. It is therefore judged most likely to be found in the Red Sea hills of Sudan or Eritrea, or possibly (because two pale-rumped swallows were seen flying out over the Red Sea towards Jeddah, just before the discovery of the type: Madge & Redman 1989) in the coastal hills of western Saudi Arabia north of Jeddah. Unidentified cliff swallows, possibly this species, have been observed in Ethiopia in the Rift Valley at Lake Langano (c.20 in November 1988: Madge & Redman 1989) and Awash National Park (six in November 1988: Madge & Redman 1989, Turner & Rose 1989; 12 in September 1993: Atkins & Harvey 1994), and in the western highlands at Gibe Gorge (one in October 1993: Atkins & Harvey 1994, and four in October 1999: Vermeulen 2000) and Jimma (one in March 1994: Atkins & Harvey 1994), though these birds are more likely to represent an undescribed taxon because they differ in a number of plumage features from *perdita*. Birders should pay careful attention to all swallows in the Horn of Africa, looking out for a ‘cliff swallow’ with a steely blue crown, blackish forehead and lores, grey rump, white chin and bluish-black throat and upper breast.

Sombre Chat *Cercomela dubia*

Data Deficient. A rare and little-known species of east-central Ethiopia and Somalia. In Ethiopia, there are records from the Awash Valley, including Awash National Park, eastwards, whilst in Somalia there is a single old record from Mt Wagar (it has not been found there subsequently, despite searches: J. Miskell *in litt.* 2006). The species seems to favour areas of rock and scrub, in common with the closely related and similar-looking Brown-tailed Chat *C. scotocerca* and Blackstart *C. melanura*, so it may be overlooked. Indeed, many observations at Awash National Park are likely to have involved misidentifications of Brown-tailed Chat (*C. Spottiswoode in litt.* 2007). Birders should search areas of rocky slopes with grass and scrub, checking all chats very carefully for this species’ diagnostic combination of dark-brown tail, greyish/brownish-white vent and strong bill. Photographic confirmation of records is desirable.

Short-billed Crombec *Sylvietta philippae*

Data Deficient. This species is found in north-west and west Somalia and adjacent parts of Ethiopia up to 80 km from the border (e.g. at Cole in June 2006: L. D. C. Fishpool *in litt.* 2006), although it is suspected to be more widespread in Ethiopia. There are also several records in the Bogol Manyo area of south-east Somalia (J. S. Ash *in litt.* 2007). It occurs in fairly dense thickets of *Acacia* and *Commiphora* on rocky ground and red sandy soil in semi-desert. *S. philippae* has been noted as fairly common at c.300 m, and ranges up to 900 m. In Somalia it has been described as widespread but not particularly common, and given the size of its range the species may not be at risk (J. Miskell *in litt.* 2006). However, as this crombec appears to be restricted to denser areas of thicket it could be sensitive to habitat alteration due to firewood collection or grazing. Further information on the species’ abundance and sensitivity to habitat disturbance is required. Short-billed Crombec is similar to Somali Crombec *S. isabellina* but has pale yellow rather than pale buff underparts, and a shorter bill. It also could be confused with Yellow-vented Eremomela *Eremomela flavicrissalis*, but has a different shape, with a shorter tail, more extensive yellow on the underparts, and longer reddish-brown (not grey) legs and dark ear-coverts contrasting with a paler supercilium.

Bulo Burti Boubou *Laniarius liberatus*

Critically Endangered. This enigmatic species (Fig. 8) aroused great controversy when it was described from blood and feather samples in 1991 (e.g. Smith *et al.* 1991, Peterson & Lanyon 1992, Banks *et al.* 1993, Collar 1999). The only known individual was first seen in August 1988, in *Acacia* scrub within the grounds of a hospital at Bulo Burti (also spelt Buulobarde or Buuloburti), 140 km inland on the Shabeelle River in central Somalia. It was mist-netted in January 1989 and, rather than being collected as a voucher specimen, released at Balcad Nature Reserve (as close to its site of capture as possible to access), in March 1990, following 14 months in captivity (mostly in Germany). Searches in the Bulo Burti area in July 1989 and April 1990 failed to produce further records (J. Miskell *in litt.* 2006). The validity of the taxon has been questioned, and it may represent a hybrid. One parent may be Red-naped Bush-shrike *L. ruficeps*, which occurs both east and north of Bulo Burti, and has a similar plumage pattern (J. Miskell *in litt.* 2006). The other parent may be a black form, described as *L. erlangeri* by Reichenow but subsequently treated as a morph of Tropical Boubou *L. aethiopicus*, which is known from the Shabeelle Valley near Bulo Burti (its call differs from that of typical Tropical Boubou, and it may well represent a separate species; J. Miskell *in litt.* 2006). Further DNA studies (including, critically, samples from the black morph of Tropical Boubou) are required to resolve this issue, but in the interim it is prudent to continue to regard Bulo Burti Boubou as a high conservation priority. When the security situation permits, *Acacia* habitat in the environs of Bulo Burti and more widely should be searched for the species. It resembles Red-naped Bush-shrike, but lacks a red nape, has a black not grey mantle, and a buffy-yellow wash to the throat and breast.

West and Central Africa

Swierstra's Francolin *Francolinus swierstrai*

Vulnerable. This Angolan endemic was formerly uncommon in the montane west of the country, from Tundavala in Huila district north to Cariango in Cuanza Sul district, on inselbergs in Huambo district and in the Bailundu Highlands.

In the latter area, Mt Moco holds the most remaining forest, although this is disappearing rapidly and is now confined to patches in deep ravines. The species had apparently not been recorded since 1971 (Pinto 1983) until seven were seen (and another pair/group heard) by Michael Mills during six days at Mt Moco in August 2005 (M. S. L. Mills *in litt.* 2006). One group was in montane forest understorey, but the others were in tall grass and other rank growth. The species is known mainly from forest and forest edge, but is also recorded from rocky and grassy mountainsides and tall-grass savannas on mountain tops. Sound-recordings made by Mills may prove useful in future searches, which are needed to determine the species' current distribution, population size and threats.

Congo Bay Owl *Phodilus prigoginei*

Endangered. Not recorded since the type-specimen was collected in 1951 at Muusi, in the Itombwe Mountains, Congo-Kinshasa, until its rediscovery in 1996, when a female was mist-netted in the extreme south-east corner of Itombwe Forest, c.95 km to the south (Omari *et al.* 1999; Fig. 5). The species may require a mosaic of grassland and either montane or bamboo forest: the type-specimen was collected at 2,430 m in a grassy clearing, whilst the 1996 record was at 1,830 m in montane gallery forest adjacent to grass and bush. Itombwe is not the only forest in Central Africa with a large area of highland forest/grassland habitat, and the species possibly occurs elsewhere. There is an unconfirmed sighting in Burundi from 1974, and calls of an unidentified owl tape-recorded in Nyungwe Forest, Rwanda, in 1990 may refer to this species (Dowsett-Lemaire 1990; recording available from the British Library Sound Archive, London, UK). König *et al.* (1999) noted that photographs of the 1996 bird show a heart-shaped facial disc typical of *Tyto* owls, rather than that of the only congener, Oriental Bay Owl *Phodilus badius*. Birders should undertake nocturnal surveys of appropriate habitat mosaics in Congo-Kinshasa and adjacent countries, for a rich, chestnut-brown owl (but be aware that the male plumage is unknown), and listen for long, mournful whistles or other calls that do not match known species. Sound-recording equipment will be essential to track down this beautiful nightbird.

Maned Owl *Jubula lettii*

Data Deficient. Known from apparently only 14 sites in Liberia (Nimba and Zwedru), Côte d'Ivoire (Tâi), Ghana (an old record from Ejura), Cameroon (Korup, Mt Rata and Rumpi Hills, Mt Cameroon, Mokoko-Onge and Nlonako Mountain [Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1999a]), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon (Gamba, Lopé and M'Passa), Congo-Brazzaville (Béna), and Congo-Kinshasa (Okapi Faunal Reserve, Itombwe). Although it is reported as rare in parts of its range, the species may simply be under-recorded. The call is unknown (König *et al.* 1999). Maned Owl is thought to prefer tall closed-canopy rainforest, not semi-evergreen or open-canopy forest, and has never been recorded outside forest or forest clearings. Further information is needed to establish its true range, population size and habitat preferences.

Prigogine's Nightjar *Caprimulgus prigoginei*

Endangered. Like Nechisar Nightjar, this caprimulgid is also known only from a single specimen, albeit a complete one: a female collected in August 1955 at Malenge, in the Itombwe Mountains of eastern Congo-Kinshasa (Curry-Lindahl 1960, Louette 1990). However, there have been a number of recent records of nightjars that probably refer to this species: at Itombwe, eastern Congo-Kinshasa (in April 1996 by T. Butynski: Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1998a), Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park, northern Congo-Brazzaville (in April 1996, plus three in May 1997: Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1998a), Odzala National Park, Congo-Brazzaville (in April 1994: F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2006), Lobéké Faunal Reserve, Cameroon (in April 1997: Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2000), and Nki Faunal Reserve, Cameroon (at two locations, in December 1997 and January 1998: Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1998b). All gave a dry staccato song somewhat reminiscent of Swamp Nightjar *C. natalensis*, but lower pitched and of a different timbre. The Lobéké bird responded to the tape made in Itombwe. None was seen apart from one at Nouabalé-Ndoki which was observed in flight at close range, at dusk, and appeared small and dark (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1998a; F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2007). The birds in Nouabalé-Ndoki were found in the same habitat as Brown Nightjar *C. binotatus* (open-canopy for-

est), but the territories of the two species did not appear to overlap (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1998a). The report by Brosset & Erard (1986) of Swamp Nightjar being heard regularly during April–May 1985 in riverside forest clearings near M'Passa, in Invindo, Gabon, probably refers to Prigogine's Nightjar also (F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2006). The type-specimen was taken in transitional forest (between lowland and montane) at 1,280 m, so the species may equally well be found in either lowland or montane forest. It should be sought in the Itombwe Mountains and more widely in Congo-Kinshasa, Cameroon and Congo-Brazzaville, using mist-nets, sound-recording equipment and the recordings from Congo-Brazzaville (which were published in Ranft & Cleere 1998).

Schouteden's Swift *Schoutedenapus schoutedeni*

Vulnerable. This swift is known with certainty from only five specimens taken east and north-east of the Itombwe Mountains, eastern Congo-Kinshasa, where it is presumably resident. However, there are possible sightings from Bwindi Forest, Uganda (near the border with Congo-Kinshasa), and Mt Tshiaberimu, north-west of Lake Edward, Congo-Kinshasa (Sarmiento & Butynski 1997, T. Butynski *in litt.* 1999). The species is known from clearings in transitional and lowland forest, at *c.* 1,000–1,470 m, and the recent possible sightings indicate that it may also be found over montane forest (to 2,700 m). The difficulty facing anyone trying to track down this species is its identification. It is dark-coloured, probably appearing all black in the field, with a medium-forked tail. It will probably be extremely difficult to separate in the field from Scarce Swift *S. myoptilus*, but Schouteden's has darker plumage, particularly on the throat, which appears only marginally paler than the rest of the underparts, whereas Scarce often has an extensive pale grey throat (Chantler & Driessens 1995). Given its close structural similarity to Scarce Swift, *schoutedeni* probably has similar behaviour and perhaps calls (short trills, followed by a metallic click, weak nasal twitterings, and then more metallic clicks: Chantler & Driessens 1995). Like Scarce Swift, it is probably fairly straightforward to separate from Common Swift *Apus apus* by its distinctive jizz, including long thin tail, narrow wings with thin primaries tapering sharply from the secondaries,

and less elegant flight action, with stiff, downward-angled wings when gliding, recalling *Collocalia* spp. (Chantler & Driessens 1995). Without specimens, prolonged observations and photographs will be necessary to support any claims, and recordings of any calls would also be useful.

Fernando Po Swift *Apus sladeniae*

Data Deficient. Known from south-east Nigeria (one record in 1961), the Bakossi Mountains in west Cameroon (one record in 1907), Bioko (=Fernando Po), Equatorial Guinea (six collected in 1903–04, but no subsequent records) and Mt Moco in Angola (two specimens from 1931, plus 2005 and 2006 records from Mount Soque: Mills & Dean submitted; M. S. L. Mills *in litt.* 2006). There is an unconfirmed sighting of *c.*10 in January 1998, at Moca in Monte Alen National Park, mainland Equatorial Guinea (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 1999b). It has been suggested that the species breeds on Bioko and visits the mainland during the non-breeding season, but the population in Angola (if really involving the same taxon) is presumably resident. The taxonomic status of *sladeniae* requires validation: although Dowsett & Forbes-Watson (1993) accord it specific status, Fry *et al.* (1988), Chantler & Driessens (1995) and Dickinson (2003) all treat it as a race of Black Swift *Apus barbatus*. Until the possibility of it being a valid species has been discounted, birders should look for the taxon throughout its possible range (in particular on Bioko), checking all Black Swifts for dark individuals lacking any grey-white feathering on the throat.

Yellow-footed Honeyguide *Melignomon eisentrauti*

Data Deficient. Known from Sierra Leone (Gola Forest: Allport *et al.* 1989, Tiwai Island in October 2005 and near Gola Reserve in September 2005: J. Lindsell *in litt.* 2007, with two aural records in unlogged forest in February 2007: F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2007), Liberia (rare resident recorded from near Mt Nimba, the Wonegizi Mountains, North Lorma National Forest [Demey 2007], the slopes of Mt Balagizi and south of Vahun), Côte d'Ivoire (Taï Forest, Mt Peko, Marahoué National Park, Cavally and Géoulé Forest Reserves [Rainey *et al.* 2003], and most recently, Anguédédou Forest Reserve, plus

probably Banco National Park: Lachenaud 2006), Ghana (Bura River Forest Reserve, Kakum National Park and Atewa Range, most recently in 2005: F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2006), Nigeria (Cross River National Park in 2004: Anon. 2005; L. D. C. Fishpool *in litt.* 2006), and Cameroon (two specimens from 1956–57, with more recent records in Nta'ali and Rumpi Hills [Green & Rodewald 1996] and Bachuo Akagbe, Mamfe [Demey 2000]). It is probably more widespread in West Africa and may be easily overlooked, but is undoubtedly rare and very poorly known. This honeyguide is found in the mid-strata and canopy of semi-deciduous and evergreen lowland forest, and is recorded mainly from primary or old secondary forest, but not in heavily degraded habitat. The species is presumably a brood-parasite, but its host/s is unknown. Although habitat throughout its range is under much pressure due to logging, agricultural encroachment and mining, the lack of records and uncertainty over its dependence on primary forest makes assessment as to whether the population is declining rapidly impossible. Further surveys are required, and these should be facilitated by the recent documentation of the species' characteristic song: a series of repeated loud, strident notes, each rising in pitch, repeated at a rate of one per second, with the series slightly descending and slowing towards the end (Rainey *et al.* 2003; F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2007). With a better understanding of the species' distribution and habitat requirements, it may well prove to be Least Concern, or perhaps Near Threatened, owing to a small and declining global population.

Eastern Wattled Cuckoo-shrike *Lobotos oriolinus*

Data Deficient. This species is known from the equatorial forests of south-east Nigeria (Ash *et al.* 1989, now considered confirmed: R. J. Dowsett *in litt.* 2007), southern Cameroon, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, the south-western Central African Republic, and eastern and north-eastern Congo-Kinshasa, but there are very few sightings throughout this range. It is found at low altitudes, inhabiting the tops of mature trees in primary, secondary and transitional forest, and has also been recorded at the edge of logged forest in Gabon. Despite its potentially wide range and unobtrusive behaviour, the species is probably very rare, although the reasons for this are unclear. It is not

immediately threatened by habitat loss as *oriolina* appears to prefer secondary forest. Data are needed to clarify its abundance, distribution and the threats the species faces. Birders should be aware that in brief or incomplete views this cuckoo-shrike could be mistaken for a forest oriole *Oriolus* spp.

Liberian Greenbul *Phyllastrephus leucolepis*

Critically Endangered. This obscure greenbul was described in 1985 on the basis of one specimen and sightings from two forest patches in Zwedru Important Bird Area, 20 km north-west of the town of the same name, near the Cavalla River, Grand Gedeh county, in south-east Liberia (Gatter 1985). Despite much field work in Liberia (pre-civil war) and adjacent countries, there have been no subsequent records, so the taxon is clearly very rare. It has been found in transitional forest between evergreen and semi-deciduous, and is known to follow mixed-species flocks and forage on branches near trunks in the mid- and understorey, often while flicking its partly-opened wings. It may simply represent an aberrant form of Icterine Greenbul *P. icterinus*, to which it appears identical apart from having cream spots on the tips of the secondaries and secondary-coverts (L. D. C. Fishpool pers. comm. 2007). However, pending resolution of its taxonomic status, and once security in the region stabilises, birders should search for this greenbul in and around Zwedru, seeking mixed-species flocks in the appropriate habitat. The much larger Western (Yellow-spotted) Nicator *Nicator chloris* has greyish, not yellowish, underparts. Unfortunately, the vocalisations of Liberian Greenbul are unknown.

Slender-tailed (Black-tailed) Cisticola *Cisticola melanurus*

Data Deficient. This cisticola is a poorly known inhabitant of north-eastern Angola, from Malanje to western Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul provinces (most recently in February 2005, c.30 km north of Calandula: Sinclair *et al.* 2007), and south-east Congo-Kinshasa, from Gungu in Kwango (Pay Kikwanga) and Shaba (upper Lufupa River and Nasondoye). However, further clarification of its range is needed, as there are relatively few specimens, and some claims may have resulted from confusion with Tabora (Long-tailed) Cisticola *C. angusticauda*, which apparently can show a black

tail and behave similarly to Slender-tailed (*P. Leonard in litt.* 2006). Slender-tailed Cisticola occurs in climax miombo woodland, where it is found in grassy patches and in the canopy of smaller trees, and forages in pairs for insects. Sinclair *et al.* (2007) report that it has characteristic wing-flicking and -snapping behaviour when disturbed, but Tabora Cisticola and other congeners exhibit very similar behaviour (*P. Leonard in litt.* 2006, *F. Dowsett-Lemaire in litt.* 2007). The key distinguishing feature is that the five outer primaries (excluding the vestigial outermost) have broad, glossy black, heavily melanised, stiff rachi (Irwin 1991), but this would require in-the-hand examination. The taxon may simply represent a form of Piping Cisticola *C. fulvicapilla* (Dowsett & Dowsett-Lemaire 1993), but pending clarification of this (and in particular the reported sympatry in Angola), data are urgently needed on Slender-tailed's distribution, abundance, ecology and the extent to which it may be suffering from habitat destruction. To be certain of the identification, birds will need to be captured and examined in the hand.

Kabobo Apalis *Apalis kaboboensis*

Data Deficient. Currently treated by BirdLife International as specifically distinct from Chestnut-throated Apalis *A. porphyrolaema* following Sibley & Monroe (1990), but treated as conspecific by most other authorities and its taxonomic status is under review by BirdLife. The taxon is known only from Mt Kabobo, west of Lake Tanganyika, in eastern Congo-Kinshasa, where suitable habitat occupies no more than 2,000 km. It is found in the canopy of montane forest, where it has been recorded at 1,600–2,480 m. There is no recent information on its habitat, but Chestnut-throated Apalis occurs in montane forest, second growth, gallery forest, forest edge, medium-sized trees and liana tangles. Like that species, *kaboboensis* probably occurs in pairs and small family parties. Montane forest on Mt Kabobo is entirely unprotected and information on the status of the habitat there is urgently needed.

Tessmann's Flycatcher *Muscicapa tessmanni*

Data Deficient. This flycatcher is known from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria (no recent records), Cameroon, Congo-

Kinshasa and mainland Equatorial Guinea. It appears to be rare throughout much of the range, though it is locally common in at least some areas, e.g., in and around Bia National Park, west Ghana (Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2005). The species has possibly been overlooked owing to its similarities to Dusky-blue Flycatcher *M. comitata*. Tessmann's, which has a more restricted range and is much less common, is larger, paler below, stronger billed, lacks the white lores and contrasting white throat of Dusky-blue, and has a more musical song (F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2007). It occurs at mid levels (5–15 m) in forest with small gaps in the canopy, appears to be less uncommon in semi-evergreen than evergreen forest, and apparently does not normally occur in heavily degraded or secondary habitat (F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2007). Some records claimed in such habitat may refer to Dusky-blue Flycatcher (F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2007). The species is threatened by conversion of forest to more intensive farms and plantations. However, more information is needed on its status, population size and trends.

Monteiro's Bush-shrike *Malaconotus monteiri*

Data Deficient. Occurs in gallery and coffee forest but is known only from relatively few sites on the escarpment of Angola, although surveys in 2005 found the species to be more widespread than previously thought, from the Dande River south to Gungo (Mills & Dean submitted). Sinclair *et al.* (2004) found it to be thinly distributed but surprisingly common at Kumbira Forest in both near-pristine forest and 'quite degraded secondary scrub' (Fig. 9). In Cameroon, a 19th century specimen from Mt Cameroon, a possible record on Mt Kupe in 1992 (Andrews 1994), and an unconfirmed report from Mt Cameroon in 1997 (Demey 1997) all probably refer to a colour morph of Green-breasted Bush-shrike *M. gladiator* (Williams 1998; M. S. L. Mills *in litt.* 2006, F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2007). Pending taxonomic clarification, birders in Cameroon should continue to search for the taxon, listening for a series of drawn-out mournful whistles similar to some of those given by Green-breasted Bush-shrike and, if seen, eliminating the possibility of the rare yellow-breasted morph of Fiery-breasted Bush-shrike *M. cruentus*, which can be separated by the lack of yellow tips to the wing-coverts, smaller yellow tips to

the tertials and rather different call (Williams 1998). In Angola, surveys are required to clarify its distribution, abundance, ecology and threats. Plumage features (including the pale lores and dark eyes) are most useful for distinguishing Monteiro's from Grey-headed Bush-shrike *M. blanchoti* which has virtually identical vocalisations (Sinclair *et al.* 2004).

Emerald (Iris Glossy) Starling *Lamprotornis (Coccycolius) iris*

Data Deficient. Known from western and south-eastern Guinea, Sierra Leone and eastern Côte d'Ivoire, where it is found in orchard bush and wooded and open savannas, keeping to the tops of tall trees. The species shuns forests but is occasionally found at the edge of gallery forest. Recent reports have included: flocks of up to 100 at Mt Sangbé National Park, Côte d'Ivoire, in March–May 2001 (Demey 2001), and in June 2002 (Demey 2003); a single bird plus a flock of ten in wooded savanna at two sites in Pic de Fon Forest Reserve, Guinea, in November–December 2002 (Demey & Rainey 2004); and several recent records from Sierra Leone (A. Siaka *per* F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2007), including 'a small flock' at Bumbuna in 2005 (Ryan 2006) and flocks of two and 15 on the Bumbuna–Magbuaka road in December 2006 (Hornbuckle 2007). The species appears to be rather localised and generally scarce, and the impact on the population of large numbers caught for the wild bird trade is unknown (R. Wilkinson *in litt.* 1998). Further information is needed to clarify the species' abundance, distribution and threats, and birders could make an important contribution to this.

Bates's Weaver *Ploceus batesi*

Endangered. This attractive weaver is inexplicably rare in southern and western Cameroon, occurring in a narrow belt from Limbe, at the foot of Mt Cameroon, east to Moloundou. Since 1990, when there were two records at Mt Kupe, it has only been seen twice, near Dja Game Reserve at Somalomo on the north-west boundary of the reserve in 1995, and at Shwani, 12 km from Somalomo, in 1996 (R. Fotso *in litt.* 1999). Subsequent searches of Mt Kupe failed to relocate the species, as did surveys in 1998–2001 in west and south-east Cameroon (F. Dowsett-Lemaire *in litt.* 2007). It occurs in lowland rainforest, though

the recent records were in secondary forest and forest edge, including degraded forest around villages. *P. batesi* occurs singly and in pairs, and one of Bates's (1930) records was in a mixed-species flock; it appears to forage on insects, bark-gleaning in the manner of Preuss's Weaver *P. preussi*, with which it could conceivably compete (Bates 1930, Bannerman 1949). The voice is unknown. Birders in southern Cameroon should be particularly vigilant for this very distinctive forest weaver as we urgently need to know more concerning its distribution, population size, ecology and possible threats.

Three Congo weavers

Congo-Kinshasa harbours three species of weaver that are very poorly known. The Data Deficient **Lake Lufira Weaver** *Ploceus ruweti* is restricted to Lake Lufira in the south, where it was common in 1960 (when the type-specimen was collected), but there is no recent information on its status. It occurs in swamps bordering Lake Lufira, in reedbeds of *Phragmites* and *Typha*, interspersed with bushes and *Sesbania leptocarpa*. The breeding season is January–April and it nests in colonies of up to 20 pairs. **Golden-naped Weaver** *P. aureonucha* (Endangered) and **Yellow-legged Weaver** *P. flavipes* (Vulnerable) are both known from Ituri Forest, eastern Congo-Kinshasa. Golden-naped occurs in a small area between Mawambi, Irumu and Beni, but it had not been recorded since 1926 until several records in 1986, including a flock of 60 at Epulu (M. C. Catsis *in litt.* 1989, 1994), followed by a record of a pair with young at the same locality in 1994 (M. Languy *in litt.* 1994). However, M. Wilson *et al.* (*in litt.* 2006) observed a pair in Semliki Valley National Park, Uganda, in August 2006, extending the known range 80 km east (Wilson *et al.* 2007). Yellow-legged has a slightly larger range within Ituri, from Avakubi east to Simbo and Campi y Wanbuti, south to Ukaika, thence east to Lima, Tungudu and Makayobe (Collar & Stuart 1985). Few people have observed the species, but it is reportedly uncommon (J. Hart *in litt.* 2000). Both species are found in the canopy of lowland rainforest, though Golden-naped has also been recorded from forest edge and old second growth with tall trees remaining. When the security situation permits, surveys are needed for all three species to

determine their present status, the condition of the habitat, and any threats.

Black-lored Waxbill *Estrilda nigriloris*

Data Deficient. This waxbill is restricted to an area judged less than 2,600 km² around the Lualaba River and Lake Upemba in southern Congo-Kinshasa. There have been no records since 1950. It occurs in grassy plains with tall grasses and bushes, in small flocks. Most of the population is probably within Upemba National Park, but it is unclear to what extent habitat there is protected. The taxon may simply be a subspecies of Common Waxbill *E. astrild* but it has a distinctive black eye-patch and a shorter, stubbier bill. Surveys are required to determine its distribution, population, habitat requirements and threats, and to provide data to determine its taxonomic status.

East Africa

Williams's Lark *Mirafra williamsi*

Data Deficient. Endemic to northern Kenya, where it occurs in two disjunct populations, one in the Dida Galgalu Desert (north of Marsabit) and the second between Isiolo and Garba Tula. The Marsabit population inhabits scattered short-grass areas with low shrubs, growing on rocky desert plains and red lava soils, whilst the Isiolo population occurs in uniform stands of low *Barleria* shrubs on rocky lava desert at 600–1,350 m. The species was not discovered until 1955 and its ecology, distribution, population size and threats are little known; surveys to determine these are needed. The species (Fig. 7) can be distinguished from Singing Bush Lark *M. cantillans* (which does not usually occur in the same habitat) by its characteristic rufous spotting on the breast, rufous-tinged upperparts, slightly longer tail, and paler bill with a dark culmen. The *intercedens* race of Fawn-coloured Lark *M. africanoides* is redder, heavily streaked below, has less white in the tail and a large reddish wing-patch. Williams's Lark is easiest to locate at dawn following the rains, when males engage in very long song-flights over their territories (B. Finch *in litt.* 2006).

Friedmann's Lark *Mirafra pulpa*

Data Deficient. A very poorly known species. In Kenya, it is known from six specimens and a few sight records (although these include an observa-

tion of at least 150 individuals), principally from Tsavo East and West National Parks. The type-specimen was collected in Ethiopia in 1912, but it has only been seen there once since, in 1998. There are also several records from Mkomazi Game Reserve in Tanzania during 1994–96 and a single record south of Arusha in August 1998 (Lack 1997). It has been suggested that the species is migratory, as birds have been found amongst other migrants attracted to the lights of Ngulia Safri Lodge in Tsavo West, and since it is largely found at certain times of year (e.g. during the rains in Tsavo). The paucity of records in other months may reflect habitat requirements (Lack 1997) or, alternatively, the difficulty of identifying non-singing individuals (B. Finch *in litt.* 2006). The species appears to prefer fairly dense grassland with bushes, possibly avoiding drier areas, and feeds on grass seeds, small grasshoppers and beetles. There are no known threats to the species but it is apparently rare, though certainly often overlooked. Friedmann's Lark (Fig. 6) is very similar to Singing Bush Lark and best identified by its characteristic song: a single long drawn-out *hoo-ee-oo* note, with a slight emphasis on the middle part, repeated at 1–2-second intervals. The song is given during undulating display-flights, or from the tops of small bushes, and also often at night (Lack 1997). The species is solitary and rather wary. Peter Lack's plea in 1997 for more information still stands a decade later: there is still much to learn about this lark's abundance, ecology, seasonal movements and possible threats.

Tana River Cisticola *Cisticola restrictus*

Data Deficient. Known from a small number of specimens, all collected in the lower Tana River basin (at Karawa, Garsen, Ijole, Mnazini and Sangole) in eastern Kenya (Collar & Stuart 1985), though it may also occur in Somalia, where there have been observations of birds perhaps of this species (Lewis 1982). It inhabits semi-arid, sandy *Acacia* bushland from lowlands to 500 m. Recent attempts to locate the species have been unsuccessful, and it has not been seen since 1972. The taxon's validity is often questioned (being regarded as aberrant Ashy Cisticolas *C. cinereolus* or a hybrid between Ashy and Rattling Cisticolas *C. chiniana*: Urban *et al.* 1997), but further examination of the type-material is desirable. Until its taxonomy is resolved, birders should search for the

species in the lower Tana River basin, listening for a song resembling that of Rattling Cisticola, given by a bird recalling a paler, browner, Ashy Cisticola, with a rusty-tinged crown, more narrowly streaked underparts, and longer, browner, buff-tipped tail with prominent black subterminal spots.

Southern Africa

White-chested Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus makawai*

Data Deficient. Known only from the type-specimen, collected in 1964 at Mayau in north-west Zambia (Benson & Irwin 1965), despite repeated attempts to relocate the taxon. It would seem to favour dense, evergreen *Cryptosepalum* thicket, dominated by *C. pseudotaxus*, and there are large areas of apparently suitable habitat in the relevant area of Zambia and adjacent Angola. The *Cryptosepalum* thickets are sparsely populated outside the West Lunga National Park and are difficult to clear for agriculture, so its habitat would appear not to be threatened, though fire is a potential risk which has affected nearby areas. The most extensive areas of suitable habitat occur within Lukwakwa Game Management Area. Although the taxon has been treated as an aberrant Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird *P. bilineatus* by many authorities, Collar & Fishpool (2006) recently argued the case again for specific status and emphasised the need for intensive surveys around the type-locality, and further north and west, covering any slight variations in the structure of *Cryptosepalum* forest caused by water or topographical features, and paying special attention to mistletoes.

Long-tailed Pipit *Anthus longicaudatus*

Data Deficient. This pipit is known from South Africa, but is presumed to be a migrant. There is also a possible sighting from Zambia (Sinclair & Ryan 2004), but this requires confirmation. The species occurs in flocks of 10–40, sometimes in mixed flocks with resident pipits—Buffy *A. vaalensis*, Grassland *A. cinnamomeus* and Long-billed Pipits *A. similis*—on playing fields in the town of Kimberley, and on surrounding farms (Liversidge 1996). There are reports that non-breeding flocks of a plain-backed pipit are common on open savannas in the northern and central Kalahari during the wet season: these could relate to the northern race of Plain-backed Pipit *A. leucophrys* or to Long-tailed Pipit (Harrison *et al.*

1997). Ornithologists in Kimberley and neighbouring regions, as well as further afield, should be on the alert for the occurrence of migratory or breeding individuals of this very poorly known species.

Madagascar and Indian Ocean

Alaotra Grebe *Tachybaptus rufolavatus*

Critically Endangered (Possibly Extinct). The sad story of Alaotra Grebe (Fig. 1) is perhaps one of biggest failures in African bird conservation in recent decades. The species was endemic to Madagascar where it was known chiefly from Lake Alaotra; given that the grebe was probably incapable of prolonged flight, the evidence suggests *rufolavatus* probably never occurred much further afield. The species was probably driven to extinction by a combination of mortality in monofilament nylon gill-nets and predation by the introduced carnivorous fish *Ophiocephalus* sp., compounded by other factors including hybridisation with Little Grebe *T. ruficollis*. There have been no direct observations since 12 were seen at Lake Alaotra in December 1982, and two were seen (in addition to several apparent hybrids) near Andreba, on Lake Alaotra, in September 1985 (Hawkins *et al.* 2000). Individuals with some characters of the species were also seen on Lake Alaotra in 1986 and 1988 (Hawkins *et al.* 2000), but a survey in 1999 found no individuals (of this or any species of *Tachybaptus*) on Lake Alaotra or surrounding lakes (ZICOMA 1999). One small glimmer of hope remains: unidentified grebes were seen in 2000 at nearby Lake Amparihinandriambavy, where there is no close human habitation. They were very difficult to approach sufficiently close to confirm their identity: at least some were Little Grebes, so the presence of Alaotra Grebe is perhaps unlikely, but not impossible (G. Young *in litt.* 2006). This wetland should be searched again as a high priority, in order to determine whether any possess the pale iris, longer bill, pale cinnamon throat and lower ear-coverts, and dusky underparts that distinguishes Alaotra Grebe from Little Grebe (which has a plain dark throat and chestnut ear-coverts), or Madagascar Grebe *T. pelzelinii* (which has a whitish line below the eye). Rediscovering this species would be a sensational success, and intensive searches at Lake Amparihinandriambavy are long overdue.

Blüntschi's Vanga *Hypositta perdita*

Data Deficient. Another 'lost' species, as indicated by its scientific name (*perdita*), this taxon was discovered and named recently on the basis of two specimens (recently fledged juveniles) collected in primary forest and grassland in 1931, near Eminiminy, a village north of Taolañaro (Fort Dauphin) adjacent to (but outside) Andohahela National Park in south-east Madagascar (Peters 1996). Goodman *et al.* (1997) and Schulenberg (2003) suggested that the specimens may represent the unknown juvenile or immature plumage of Nuthatch Vanga *H. corallirostris*, a tree-climber of humid evergreen forest. However, further study is needed to establish whether the differences in relative proportions of the feet and legs between the type-specimens of Blüntschi's Vanga and adult Nuthatch Vanga could be accounted for by the former being juvenile Nuthatch Vanga. If they cannot, then Blüntschi's Vanga may well be a valid species, with the foot morphology apparently indicating that it is not specialised in climbing. As such, the two taxa would be ecologically separated and may co-exist. A faunal inventory of Andohahela in 1995, which included forest near Eminiminy, found only Nuthatch Vanga (Goodman *et al.* 1997). The principal threat to the forests of this region is from slash-and-burn cultivation by subsistence farmers. It is thus possible that Blüntschi's Vanga may have become extinct since 1931 (Peters 1996), although forest survives at Eminiminy (R. J. Safford *in litt.* 2006). Pending further clarification of its taxonomy, Blüntschi's Vanga should be searched for in suitable habitat (presumably forest) in the region of the type-locality.

A trio of Comoros scops owls

The Indian Ocean islands of the Comoros hold three poorly known, Critically Endangered, scops owls: Anjouan *Otus capnodes*, Mohéli *O. moheliensis* and Grand Comoro *O. pauliani*. Anjouan Scops Owl (Fig. 2) was rediscovered on Anjouan (Ndzuani) in 1992, after 106 years without a scientific record (Safford 1993). The population size has been variously estimated at 100–200 pairs and 50 individuals, but is probably somewhere between the two (H. Doulton *in litt.* 2006). It survives in remnants of native upland forest, usually on steep slopes, though it has recently also been found as low as 300 m in highly degraded forest

(H. Doulton *in litt.* 2006). Nevertheless, the species is likely to be under pressure from agriculture, timber extraction, charcoal manufacture and invasive alien plants. **Mohéli Scops Owl** is endemic to Mohéli, where the population is estimated at 400 individuals. The species (Fig. 3) is found in dense, humid forest, which remains only on the central peak and its upper slopes. This owl is common in intact forest, but such habitat is under pressure from subsistence agriculture. The third species, **Grand Comoro Scops Owl**, is found only on Mt Karthala, an active volcano on Grand Comoro (Ngazidja), where it occurs from 650 m to the treeline, on the north, west and south flanks of the volcano, where *c.* 100 km² of suitable primary, montane, evergreen forest is extant. Population size is probably in excess of 1,000 pairs (H. Doulton *in litt.* 2006), but intact forest is declining as agriculture advances upslope. Up-to-date information on the status, population trends, ecology and threats for all three species is urgently needed to help support their conservation.

Afterword

Hopefully this article will draw people's attention to a suite of threatened and Data Deficient species for which new information (in some cases, an initial confirmation of their continued existence) is urgently needed to further their conservation. Many additional species remain poorly known and might have been included here, e.g. **Nubian Bustard** *Neotis nuba* (Near Threatened; rare and little known, with the main populations probably in Niger and Chad, but under severe hunting pressure and possibly more threatened than currently assessed); **Shelley's Eagle Owl** *Bubo shelleyi* (Near Threatened; rare, known from scattered localities between Sierra Leone and northern Congo-Kinshasa); **Ash's Lark** *Mirafra ashi* (Endangered; known from only one small area in south-east Somalia); **Degodi Lark** *Mirafra degodiensis* (Vulnerable; known from few recent records in a very restricted range in southern Ethiopia, but note that its taxonomic status is currently under review by BirdLife); **Prigogine's Bulbul** *Chlorocichla prigoginei* (Endangered; restricted to two sites in eastern Congo-Kinshasa); **Dusky Greenbul** *Bernieria tenebrosus* (Vulnerable; apparently often misidentified, with few reliable records, from central-eastern rainforests in Madagascar); **Rockefeller's Sunbird** *Nectarinia*

rockefelleri (Vulnerable; restricted to the Itombwe Mountains and near Lake Kivu in eastern Congo-Kinshasa, with few recent data on its status); **Anambra Waxbill** *Estrilda poliopareia* (Vulnerable; known only from the Niger delta in southern Nigeria, with few recent records apart from those at Tombia [Anon. 2002] and those documented in Roux & Otobotekere 2005); **São Tomé Grosbeak** *Neospiza concolor* (Critically Endangered; rediscovered in 1991, with a few recent sightings mainly from the Xufexufe and São Miguel areas); **Warsangli Linnet** *Carduelis johannis* (Endangered; restricted to two small areas in the northern Somali highlands); plus four Data Deficient species that are currently under review for reclassification as Least Concern: **Brazza's Martin** *Phedina brazzae*, **African River Martin** *Pseudochelidon eurystomina*, **Baumann's Greenbul** *Phyllastrephus baumanni* and **Dorst's Cisticola** *Cisticola guinea* (see discussions at www.birdlifeforums.org); as well as the recently rediscovered but still poorly known species mentioned in the introduction. Countries that are particularly information-poor include Angola (notwithstanding several recent surveys), Somalia, Ethiopia (which also has several possible new species awaiting description), northern Mozambique and southern Congo-Kinshasa.

There are now several sources of funding that will support searches and surveys for species such as these, including: (1) the African Bird Club's Conservation Fund (see www.africanbirdclub.org); (2) the Birdfair/Royal Society for the Protection of Birds research fund for endangered birds (contact paul.donald@rspb.org.uk); (3) the British Ornithologists' Union's ornithological research grants (see www.bou.org.uk); (4) the Club 300 Foundation for Bird Protection (e-mail birdprotection@club300.se); and (5) the BP Conservation Programme (see <http://conservation.bp.com>).

For African countries that have national NGO Partners of BirdLife International, birders from elsewhere planning to search for or survey the birds described above are strongly encouraged to liaise with these organisations (see www.birdlife.org/worldwide/national/index.html) in order to seek advice on local logistics and security, and to maximise the utility of any field work to such organisations' conservation programmes.

BirdLife International is responsible for collating information and assessing the status of all of

the world's birds for the IUCN Red List. We would therefore be pleased to hear of the results of any searches, positive or negative. Most birders in Africa seem to visit the same well-established sites, but there is a tremendous opportunity for them to apply their skills and resources in a way that will deliver significant conservation benefits. BirdLife encourages you to venture off the beaten path, track down these species, and help their conservation!

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Figure 1. Alaotra Grebe / Grèbe roussâtre *Podiceps rufolavatus*, Zahamena, Madagascar, 1985 (Paul Thompson)

Figure 2. Anjouan Scops Owl *Otus capnodes*: a mixed pair of rufous and dark morph individuals, near Lingoni, Anjouan, July 2005 (Charles Marsh)

Petit-duc d'Anjouan *Otus capnodes*: un couple mixte d'individus de forme rousse et sombre, près de Lingoni, Anjouan, July 2005 (Charles Marsh)

Figure 3. Nechisar Nightjar *Caprimulgus solala*: the wing from which this species is known, found on Nechisar Plains, Ethiopia, 3 September 1990 (photographed on 4 September 1990: Roger Safford)

Engoulevent de Nechisar *Caprimulgus solala*: l'aile par laquelle l'espèce est connue, trouvée dans la Plaine de Nechisar, Ethiopie, 3 septembre 1990 (photographié le 4 septembre 1990: Roger Safford)

Figure 4. Mohéli Scops Owl / Petit-duc de Mohéli *Otus moheliensis*, Chalet St Antoine, Mohéli, October 2000 (Claire Spottiswoode).

Figure 5. Congo Bay Owl *Phodilus prigoginei*: female mist-netted, Itombwe Forest, 1 May 1996 (Tom Butynski)
Phodile de Prigogine *Phodilus prigoginei*: femelle prise au filet, Forêt de l'Itombwe, 1 mai 1996 (Tom Butynski)

Figure 6. Friedmann's Lark / Alouette de Friedmann *Mirafra pulpa*, Taita Discovery Centre, Rukinga Ranch, Tsavo, Kenya, 12 October 2005 (Brian Finch)

Figure 7. Bulu Burti Boubou / Gonolek de Bulu Burti *Laniarius liberatus*, Bulu Burti, Somalia, 1989 (E. F. G. Smith)

Figure 8. Williams's Lark / Alouette de Williams *Mirafra williamsi*, Shaba Game Reserve, 14 February 2003 (Brian Finch)

Figure 9. Monteiro's Bush-shrike / Gladiateur de Monteiro *Malaconotus monteiri*, Kumbira Forest, near Conda, Angola, October 2003 (Callan Cohen)

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